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ABSTRACT

A study examined some of the reasons behind communication apprehension. The participants were 240 students (120 men and 120 women) from a southern community college enrolled in the basic public speaking course. Their writings were collected over a period of 7 years and selected randomly for analysis. The second week of the semester, students were asked to free write by finishing the following sentence: "Giving a speech makes me feel...." The writings were analyzed using discourse analysis. They were sorted into three categories: (1) positive responses; (2) negative responses based on the anticipation of physical symptoms of nervousness; and (3) negative responses based on the anticipation that the audience would response negatively to their speech. Results showed that a higher percentage of men (19%) than women (11%) are comfortable with public speaking. Further, it showed that men and women have different reasons for communication apprehension. Generally, men fit into the second category above and women into the third. Four fields of inquiry were developed to investigate these results and to generate further research hypotheses. These hypotheses suggest that men's self-esteem is internally based while women's is based on what others think; that women are more likely to focus on body image and physical appearance as measures of competency; that men do not access their emotions as readily as women and, therefore, do not know how to put them on paper; and that men's expectations of oral communication are internally determined, while women's are externally determined. (Contains 24 references.) (TB)

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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS ON GENDER BASED FEAR REACTIONS IN COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION WRITINGS

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PRELIMINARY FINDINGS ON GENDER BASED FEAR REACTIONS IN CA WRITINGS

The students traumatized by fear of giving an oral presentation are familiar to all those who require any sort of performance in their classes. Zimbardo (1977) asserts that shyness, a fear of communicating, is reaching epidemic proportions and can justifiably be called a social disease. Whether or not one agrees that fear of communicating has reached epidemic proportions, it must be acknowledged that communication apprehension (CA) affects a significant number of people, especially students in the nation's classrooms.

> Surveys of almost 20,000 college students from 3 universities over an eight year period indicate that between fifteen and twenty percent experience CA to the degree that their functioning in everyday encounters is impaired (Adler, 1980, p. 215)

Research concludes that the impact of high CA on the probability of the students' survival in college is substantial. McCroskey, Booth-Butterfield, & Payne's (1989) research indicates that CA is conceptualized as a causal agent in student success, both academic and interpersonal. Academic and interpersonal success have been identified by prior research as primary predictors of persistence in college. A four year longitudinal study of the impact of CA on grade point average and persistence at the university level indicated that high CA students were more likely to drop out of college and to attain lower grade point averages than low CA students.

ETIOLOGY

There are a myriad of possible causes of CA. This multiplicity of cause-effect theories is common in examining human behavior (Friedman, 1980). The etiological research in CA points to numerous causal agents. For organizational and conceptual purposes, CA research has been divided into three general categories; genetic, psychological and environmental causes.

Genetic factors have been examined as causal agents of CA since etiological research began. Scarr's (1969) study of twin girls indicated that the tendency for social introversion-extroversion was inherited.

A number of psychological explanations predict CA etiology. Friedman (1980) proposed traumatic experiences as causal factors of CA. These experiences can cause emotional

scars that are long lasting. These experiences increase the uncertainty of communication outcomes (in the mind). One psychoanalyst has reported that in his shy patients the fears of being unwanted or ignored are displaced by grandiose fantasies of having an enormous effect on others and by preoccupation with self. These are traits which are commonly found in reticent individuals (Kaplan, 1972).

A variety of environmental causes have been suggested in the literature under the headings of reinforcement, skills acquisition, and modeling (Daly, 1977). These three environmental explanations for the development of CA share certain emphases. All suggest the predominance of positive communication environments for discouraging apprehension in a child. These environments, and the significant others who occupy them should provide a high level of positive reinforcement for interaction attempts, offer good skills training, and present adequate models of communication and sociability (Daly & Friedrich, 1981).

But, whatever the myriad causes may be, persons who are unskilled, or perceive themselves as unskilled, in any situation are more reluctant to attempt the situation. If those persons are forced to function in the position for which they lack skills, they will find themselves quite uncomfortable. That discomfort is based on uncertainty about success or perceived certainty of failure.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 240 students from a southern community college enrolled in the basic public speaking course. Their writings were collected over a period of seven years and selected randomly for analysis; 120 men and 120 women were chosen. The majority were traditional students with a small percentage being non-traditional. They were overwhelmingly middle class Caucasians with only a handful of international and minority students.

PROCEDURE

The second week of the semester, the students were asked to free write as follows: "Giving a speech makes me feel _____." They were directed to fill in the blank with the word appropriate to them and to continue writing their feelings until asked to stop (approx 4 minutes). This exercise was done at the beginning of a class period, before

the lecture on dealing with CA. They were instructed that the assignment would not be graded, but they would be sharing the information with small groups of their classmates.

The writings were analyzed using discourse analysis. They were sorted into three categories: Those who filled in the blank with 1. Positive responses such as "important" or "powerful". 2. Negative descriptions of physical symptoms of nervousness such as "hands shaking" or "blushing". 3. Descriptions of anticipated negative judgements by the audience such as "I'll bore the audience to death: or "I'm afraid of looking stupid in front of the audience".

RESULTS

1. Positive responses:
   Males - 23 of 120 (19%) wrote positive responses
   Females - 13 of 120 (11%) wrote positive responses
2. Negative descriptions of physical symptoms:
   Males - 72 of 120 (60%) described physical symptoms only
   Females - 41 of 120 (34%) described physical symptoms only
3. Descriptions of anticipated negative judgements by the audience:
   Males - 25 of 120 (21%) wrote about judgements
   Females - 66 of 120 (55%) wrote about judgements

DISCUSSION

This analysis indicates that a higher percentage of men (19%) than women (11%) are comfortable with public speaking. Further , we find that while 85% of these students expressed nervousness while giving a speech, the men and women had different reasons for experiencing CA. 60% of the men wrote only about their physical symptoms, as opposed to 34% of the women. But more than half of the women wrote about being judged by the audience.

A recurring theme in the women's writing was "being stared at" or "all eyes are on me". Sixteen of the women wrote about it, while only one man used the term "stared at". That seems to indicate that women are focused externally during public speaking.

Of the positive responses to speaking, men and women used different language: 4 of the men, but only 1 woman used "powerful". Five of the men spoke of an adrenaline rush or a buzz which they enjoyed; none of the women used those terms. The women used the terms "important" (4) and "confident" (2).

QUESTIONS GENERATED

What we have not isolated is why the majority of women tend to concern themselves with what the audience will think, and the majority of men dwell only on their physical symptoms. Therefore we have developed four fields of inquiry with accompanying research questions and possible hypotheses:

RQ 1: Why do the majority of men describe fear of giving a speech in terms of physical symptoms?

RQ 2: Why do the majority of women describe fear of giving a speech in terms of audience reaction?

Possible hypotheses:

H 1: Men's self-esteem is internally based, while women measure self esteem through others' eyes.

H 2: In a multidimensional model of self-esteem, women are more likely than men to focus on body image and physical appearance as measures of competency.

H 3: Men do not access their emotions as readily as women, therefore do not know how to put them on paper.

H 4: In terms of locus of control, men's general expectations about oral communication are internally determined (self determined), while women's expectations about oral communication are externally determined (other determined).

SELF-ESTEEM

In addressing H 1 (Men's self-esteem is internally based, while women measure self-esteem through others' eyes), we found that research demonstrates differences in self-esteem which affect behavior in achievement and causal attribution. People with low self-esteem often disapprove of themselves, speaking in ways which reflect their disapproval. Those with low self-esteem may show an expectation of rejection by others (Campbell, 1990). It is within the realm of possibility to attribute a remark such as "the audience will probably think I'm stupid" to low self
esteem.

Campbell (1990) further states that people with higher self-esteem usually express positive views of themselves and make statements that show an expectation of acceptance.

Verderber & Verderber (1995) take the argument further,

explaining that self-esteem affects communication style. A person with low self-esteem is unsure of the value of his/her contributions and expects others to view him/her negatively. While persons with high self-esteem are likely to be more confident of the value of their contributions and expect others to see their value.

> Whether or not low self-esteem views are realistic, people who hold them accept others' real or imagined negative views as additional evidence that they are indeed unworthy (Verderber & Verderber, 1995).

If the students express fear of negative judgement by an audience, we could conclude that these students are experiencing low self-esteem. Since the majority of those expressing fear of negative judgement are female, we could conclude that in females low self-esteem is a correlational factor with high CA.

Hall (1982) in Treichler and Kramarae reports that the academic environment is profoundly alienating for women students and faculty. The alienation may lead to lower self-confidence, discourage intellectual participation, and jeopardize women's potential for equal education and achievement.

PHYSICAL SELF-CONCEPT

Information which illuminates H 2 (in a multidimensional model of self-esteem, women are more likely than men to focus on body image and physical appearance as measures of competency) follows.

Sonstroem and Morgan (1989) developed a working model for examining self-esteem through competency development. In their model, self-esteem is divided into social, emotional, and physical self-concepts. Physical self-concept is further subdivided into self-perceptions of physical ability and self-perceptions of physical appearance. Perhaps it is these two domains of the self-concept (physical ability and self-perception) that explain why women are focused externally during public speaking.

Women's preoccupation with how others see them is well documented (Rosenbaum, 1978; Simmons and Rosenberg, 1976; Striegel-Moore, Silberstein, & Rodin, 1993; Thompson & Schwartz, 1981). Young women constantly receive the message that their attractiveness is the most important aspect of their self. Women therefore incorporate these messages into their self schema, resulting in an exaggerated emphasis on how significant others perceive their physical appearance. In one study adolescents were asked to rate their various body parts for attractiveness and for effectiveness in daily

functioning (Lerner, Orlos, & Knapp, 1976). For females, attractiveness was the most important contributor to self-concept; in other words, females who thought that their bodies were attractive had positive self-concepts. For males, effectiveness was most important; males who thought that their bodies were effective had positive self-concepts.

Simmons and Rosenberg (1976) found that adolescent females reported having less stable self-images than adolescent males. One question in the study was, "If a teacher asked you to get up in front of the class and talk a little bit about your summer, would you be very nervous, a little nervous, or not at all nervous?" 41 percent of the females reported that they would be highly self-conscious, in contrast to 29 percent of the males.

In summary then, it appears that using a multi-dimensional model of self-concept enables us to examine the relationship between estimation of physical attractiveness and perceived competency. We can speculate that female students judge their ability (competency) to stand up and deliver a speech based on how the audience appears to be receiving them: focusing on issues related to how do I look, what are they thinking of me, do I look nervous, do I appear to be knowledgeable and prepared, etc. In comparison, we might speculate that men's perception of competency is not based on how do I look to others, but rather on how do I look to myself?

LANGUAGE - ACCESSING EMOTIONS

In addressing H 3 (Men do not access their emotions as readily as women, therefore do not know how to put them on paper) we see that low self-esteem sometimes manifests itself in use of the language. Lakoff (1975) notes that women use more hedges, qualifiers, and tag questions than men, making their speech more tentative. Lakoff argues that women's speech reflects their socialization into subordinate roles and low self-esteem.

Studies of the socialization of children (Maltz & Borker, 1982) give insight into the adult use of the language. Boys play games which are competitive, have clear goals, and are organized by rules and roles. As a result boy's games cultivate three communication rules:

1. Use communication to assert yourself
2. Use communication to attract and maintain an audience
3. Use communication to compete with others

As adults many men feel an importance to be invulnerable and guarded. If others are the competition from whom you must

seize center stage, then you cannot let them know too much about yourself and your weaknesses (Maltz & Borker in Wood, 1994).

Girls' games involve playing in pairs or small groups with no preset, clear-cut goals, rules, and roles. Girls' games teach three basic rules for communication:

1. Use cooperative talk to create relationships
2. Avoid criticizing, outdoing, or putting others down
3. Pay attention to others and to relationships; interpret and respond to others' feeling sensitively.

As adults, women engage in conversation to share themselves and to learn about others; their speech tends to display identifiable features that foster connections, support, closeness, and understanding (Wood, 1994).

Men communicate more abstractly than women. They frequently speak in general terms that are removed from concrete experiences and distanced from personal feelings (Schaef: Treichler & Kramarae, in Wood, 1994).

If men distance themselves from personal feelings, they would be reluctant to put them on paper. When asked to write about their "feelings" many men will only describe physical feelings, but would be uncomfortable writing about emotional feelings. The emotions may certainly be present in the men, but would not be expressed, due to the socialization they have experienced.

LOCUS OF CONTROL

Finally, let us turn to H 4: In terms of locus of control, men's general expectations about oral communiction are internally determined (self determined), while women's expectations about oral communication are externally determined (other determined).

Rotter (1961, 1966, 1992) introduced his concept of locus of control, referring to a person's belief about how well he or she can bring about good events and avoid bad events, in an attempt to further social science's understanding of the mechanisms of personal control. Rotter's locus of control construct separated people into internal controllers, those who believe they can control the outcomes in their lives, and external controllers, those who believe their lives are controlled by chance or powerful others.

Thousands of investigations have looked at locus of control (Peterson, & Stunkard, 1992). Summarizing their survey of these investigations, these researchers found the typical internal to be one who actively comes to grips with

the world. Compared to the external, the internal is resistant to social pressure and likely to attribute to themselves all manner of positive affirmations.

In summary, we might speculate that female students may be predisposed to an external locus of control as a result of their internal estimation of self based on physical appearance. In other words, if women are socialized into defining their self esteem (i.e. physical attractiveness) through the eyes of significant others (society), then that same socialization process would predispose women towards an external locus of control. The end result would then explain why female speech students are more focused on their audience's acceptance and judgement of them, as compared to their male counterparts.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

First there is a need to test one assumption posed about low self-esteem correlating with high CA. We plan to use the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension by McCroskey to measure the CA and the Rosenberg Scale to measure self-esteem and then do correlational analysis to test the strength of the correlation.

Of course, each hypothesis must be tested. This may be more challenging than the correlational analysis of the CA and self-esteem. We have yet to find instruments for measuring the variables and may need to design them. It is necessary for the study to have an instrument which measures more than the amount of self-esteem, it must also measure what factors create or inhibit the self-esteem.

Additionally, we must be alert to other possible answers to our research questions; we have posed four, but there are conceivably numerous others. It is desirable that these hypotheses be examined in the ongoing search to shed light on the etiology of communication apprehension.

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